

Protocol for an Address to the Nation on the ABC

In exceptional circumstances of urgent national importance the Prime Minister may wish to address the nation directly, to inform the public or to seek its cooperation. The ABC is created for public purposes, sustained by public funds, accessible to Australians throughout the country and the region, and has radio, television and online platforms suitable to carry an address to the nation.

Any uninterrupted address by a political leader carried on the public broadcaster's facilities without the scrutiny usually associated with a news conference, interview or other mediated communication, should be rare in a democratic society. Having regard to the statutory duty of the ABC to maintain its independence and integrity, the procedure for addresses to the nation is as follows –

- 1 Access for the Prime Minister (the PM) to ABC facilities to address the nation will be sought in writing by the PM through the Minister responsible for the ABC (the Minister).
- 2 Requests will be sent from the Minister to the ABC Chair through the ABC Managing Director.
- 3 Requests will state briefly the subject of the address, its duration and the exceptional circumstances of urgent national importance that make a direct address necessary in the public interest.
- 4 The Managing Director will promptly acknowledge receipt of the request and at the same time make the PM aware, through the Minister, that the ABC Board may regard it as appropriate to offer a comparable opportunity to the Leader of the Opposition.
- 5 The ABC Chair will confer with other Board members if time permits and convey a decision to the PM through the Managing Director and Minister.
- 6 The ABC will not unreasonably refuse a request from a PM to address the nation.
- 7 The ABC reserves the right to make public its reasons for a grant or refusal of time.
- 8 Arrangements for an address, including its scheduling, will be made directly between the PM's staff and ABC personnel accountable to the Managing Director.
- 9 Any ABC offer of a comparable opportunity will be approved by the ABC Chair and conveyed by the Managing Director to the Opposition Leader with a request that the Opposition Leader respond within three days of the PM's address.

- 10 Arrangements for an address, including its scheduling, will be made directly between the Opposition Leader's staff and ABC personnel accountable to the Managing Director.
- 11 An address by the Opposition Leader will be broadcast within one week of the PM's address.
- 12 In this protocol, the terms Prime Minister, Opposition Leader, Chair and Managing Director include persons acting in those roles.